

AMERICAN  
*art*  
COLLECTOR



*Now Showcasing Glass,  
Ceramics & Wood*



# Circle of influence



1



2

**1**  
**Phil Jurus**, *Great Barrier Reef*, Australian redwood burl, 3 x 10½ x 17½". Collection of Phil Jurus. Photo by John Carlano.

**2**  
**Emil Milan (1923-1985)**, *Whale in a Wave*, walnut, 16 x 14 x 13". Collection of Craig and Sandy Edelbrock. Photo by John Carlano.

**3**  
**Barry Gordon**, *Pirogue*, hard maple, 3 x 4 x 22". Collection of Barry and Barbara Gordon. Photo by John Carlano.

Through January 24, The Center for Art in Wood in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, will host the exhibit *Rediscovering Emil Milan and His Circle of Influence*, displaying more than 110 wooden works by **Emil Milan (1922-1985)** and his contemporaries. As part of the show, visitors will see various aspects of Milan's art—figural studies of human and animal forms, abstractions, and functional sculpture. Work by 15 artists he influenced also will be on view in the exhibit. As The Center for Wood Art explains, the work by his "Circle of Influence" represents a range from first inspirations that mimic the teacher's style, to fully formed unique artistic voices that still sing the praises of the master."

"Emil Milan was an important, albeit not well-known, artist working in wood from the time after his military service during World War II until his death in 1985. His work united the traditions of woodcarving, a desire to provide art for everyday life, and the abstracted natural forms popular during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century," says Jennifer Zwilling, curator of the show. "The exhibition, a symposium scheduled for January 17 and

a forthcoming book would not have been possible without the Emil Milan Research Project, conducted by **Barry Gordon**, **Phil Jurus**, and **Norm Sartorius**, whose work is also included in the show, and a grant from the John and Robyn Horn Foundation."

The Emil Milan Research Project was organized seven years ago by Gordon, Jurus, and Sartorius, who found their artistic careers were influenced by Milan. Together they began to research the artist, initially finding very little information. After receiving a generous grant of \$14,000 from The Center for Craft Creativity & Design, they decided to begin a biography

for the artist, which is forthcoming. As a result of their efforts, there have been two exhibits focusing on Milan, including the one at The Center for Art in Wood.

Jurus, who knew Milan and became friends with the artist, says he was influenced by Milan when he saw his birds and bowls on exhibit. "Many visits to Emil's home and barn workshop allowed me to observe the mastery he executed in sculpting his pieces, discussing and learning about the use of tools and techniques, and being mentored by him in types of wood and finishes," says Jurus, who at the time was a jewelry designer.



3



4

“In 2009, I closed my gallery and stopped making jewelry. In 2010, I set up a wood studio and, drawing on the inspiration of my mentor, Emil Milan, resumed making functional objects in wood and furniture.”

Wooden spoon maker Gordon encountered the artist when he spent “a glorious afternoon in Milan’s studio as Milan demonstrated spoon making.” As Gordon describes, “Milan’s great talent in design and execution, including his (then) unorthodox methods, was obvious. His considerable physical strength, expressed through his fluid motions, also contributed a lasting impression.” Gordon also has realized Milan’s “pioneering merger of hand and powered techniques

and willingness to blaze new paths” has influenced his approach.

Sartorius, who studied under Jurus, was influenced by how Milan used certain tools. “Milan was not a romantic about tools,” says Sartorius. “He was all about the quality of the work produced, but if a power sander got that result faster that was his path. He was an early innovator and adaptor of the use of power carving...My use of abrasives as carving tools mirrors Milan’s approach. This has enabled me to use woods ignored by many wood artists...My sculpture *Homage* is a tribute to his influence in my own career.” ●

**4**  
**Norm Sartorius,**  
*Homage*, cocobolo,  
15½ x 10½ x 5".  
Yale University Art  
Gallery, gift of Kenneth  
Spitzbard. Photo  
by Jim Osborn.